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From Africans in America to African-American

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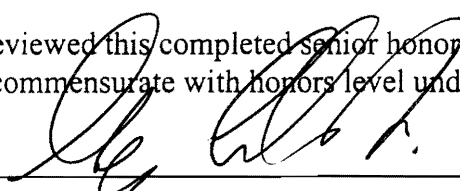
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African American"

I have reviewed this completed senior honors thesis with this student and certify that it is a project commensurate with honors level undergraduate research in this field.

Signed: , Faculty Mentor

Date: Aug. 18, 2003

Comments (Optional):

Prospectus

Research Question

When did African (Black) Americans identify themselves as American and a distinct group of people?

- Note: Make distinction that the researcher wants to determine when blacks in America identified themselves as American. Liberia example clearly illustrates that Africans considered black slaves in America American when they returned to the African continent in 1822.
- Note: The researcher is not looking for the precise date with regard to the legality of blacks becoming American citizens. This was established by the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1865.

Research Method

Literature Review: Researcher attempted to find more historical background of “Black American” identity not sociological factors of the identification of being black. This has been unsuccessful, thus researcher has devised a research plan to assess the historical era that blacks in America began to identify themselves as American.

Research Plan: Identify specific eras in American history and research the writings of blacks in America during each particular era to assess when in American history blacks began to identify themselves as American.

Eras: Colonial Era (1600s - 1776)
Revolutionary Philosophy – The Civil War (1770s – 1865)
Reconstruction and the early 20th century (1865-1919)
Between the World Wars (1920-1940)

Researcher plans to read political writings by blacks in America in each era and other historical researchers to attempt to pinpoint when blacks in America began to identify themselves as a people who belonged in America and who in essence were American.

Abstract

African American—now, the acceptable or politically correct name for the black population in America is by historical terms a very recent identification. This unique group of people has survived living in America from the time of its colonial existence though most are the descendants of African people who did not choose to migrate to America. Through a shared history of oppression and hardship, blacks in America now characterize themselves as a distinct race of people. African American, being American with African ancestry as opposed to Africans in America, was not conceived until the New Negro Renaissance in America which spanned the first two decades of the twentieth century and was solidified during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s.

From Africans in America to African American

Tammra S. Mitchell

Honors Research Project

Summer 2003

Introduction

The evolution from being African to becoming African American was a long transition for the unknown number of Africans who were brought to the New World and who would eventually settle in the United States of America. Many sociological factors would make this distinction hard for blacks in America. First, one must note that “Africans were ethnically, linguistically, religiously, and culturally varied peoples.”¹ Scholarly estimates calculate that approximately fifteen million Africans were brought to the New World through the dealings of the Atlantic Slave Trade. These Africans were from many different regions and empires on the African continent. The final destinations of these Africans were a number of different regions in the Americas with most being placed in Central and South America. The British North American colonies were late entrants into the slave trade, yet they became one of the most dominant forces in maintaining this trade. The voyage from Africa to the Americas, known as the middle passage, seized many Africans’ lives and was a horrific experience for those who survived. When slaves reached their final destinations their lives were so hard that many died within ten years of their arrival. Thus, it was hard if not impossible for African families to survive through slavery. Secondly, it must be noted that African slaves could not communicate effectively with one another in the New World because of their different languages and cultures.² The slave trade and the institution of slavery were successful in stripping Africans of their identities. For those blacks who settled in North America, it would be more than two and a half centuries before they would have the freedom to distinguish themselves as a distinct race of people, Americans of African ancestry.

Colonial Era (1600s-1770s)

The history of Africans in America began at the same time that American history began; the first blacks were brought to America in 1619 approximately five years after the founding of Jamestown, the first permanent English settlement in North America.³ The first Africans were not brought to America to be in a permanent state of bondage, but were indentured servants that could work for their freedom. Africans were not the only indentured servants and were not even the first choice by Europeans to serve as their workforce in the New World. In North America, poor white Europeans were brought to the New World as indentured servants and were the primary labor force in the colonies for the first two decades. The emergence of African slavery as the dominant labor force in the colonies was one of convenience. According to John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., “blacks presented so few of the difficulties encountered with whites.”⁴ The eased difficulties included easier apprehension because of Africans’ color, the fact that Africans could be “purchased outright,” and the thought that Africans were inexhaustible and could provide a constant labor supply.⁵ In 1640, Virginia set the precedent for African slavery by sentencing a runaway black indentured servant to bondage for life; while his white counterparts’ punishments were to serve one extra year to their master each. Virginia became the first colony to recognize African slavery by law in 1661.⁶

African slavery lasted for over two centuries in North America spanning the entire colonial era and existing roughly ninety years in the new nation, The United States of America. During these centuries free blacks also lived in North America. Some blacks were born free while others purchased their freedom or were fugitive slaves. Most of the black literature of the slavery era was written by this group. The narrative was the most

popular form of literary expression by blacks in America during the period; poetry was also a popular literary form. Both forms of writing were used as outlets for blacks to express their political views on life in America.

One of the most famous narratives of the colonial period was that of Olaudah Equiano entitled *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself*. Equiano told of his native land in Africa where he was a member of the Ibo people. He wrote of his kidnapping and the horrors of his travel through the Middle Passage. Equiano was enslaved in North America, but eventually gained his freedom and lived his life as a seaman. When he was not at sea he lived in England.⁷ This narrative was the first of many fugitive slave narratives that told the author's life story in order to speak out against the institution of slavery. Another narrative of the colonial era was *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, A Native of Africa, But Resident Above Sixty Years in the United States of America. Related by Himself*. The year of publication for this narrative was 1798. Therefore, Venture Smith lived during the colonial era and the first two decades of the new nation. This narrative also begins with the author relating his early childhood in Africa and of his capture by slave traders.⁸ The significance of these two narratives in American literature is that they are the products of African born slaves who were in essence African. As the institution of slavery progressed many of the blacks in America were not native born Africans, though society –white and black- still called many of the blacks in America “African”. Or they were considered a people without a nationality or national identification. The narrative would also be a common form of literary expression among American born blacks during the abolitionist movement.

Another black writer during the colonial period was the poet Phillis Wheatley. Wheatley was the slave of John Wheatley and his wife, Susanna; she served as Susanna's personal maid. Her name was composed of Phillis, the ship from which she was brought to America from West Africa, and Wheatley the surname of her owners. Phillis was taught by her owners. She learned the Bible, English and Latin literature, and history among other subjects and eventually began to write poetry in English, her second language. Wheatley became the first black in America to publish a book and was known internationally as the native African who grasped the English language with such ease that she was writing poetry after about four years of being introduced to the English language. Wheatley's poetry is considered controversial to recent African American literary scholars because she did not use her poetry to speak out against prejudices that blacks in America faced during that time.⁹ Wheatley's poem "On Being Brought from Africa to America" is one of the most controversial as it calls Africa a "*Pagan* land" and acknowledges America as the land that taught her about Christianity and God's salvation.¹⁰ Though Wheatley wrote positively of America and her living in America, one may also assume that she still considered herself to be African because she later writes a poem entitled "To S. M., a Young African Painter, on Seeing His Works" and she ended her poem "On Being Brought from Africa to America" with the following lines:

Some view our sable race with scornful eye,

"Their colour is a diabolic die."

Remember, *Christians*, *Negros*, black as *Cain*,

May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.¹¹

Wheatley never acknowledged blacks as American, but wrote that anyone could become a Christian. The sable race she refers to is probably blacks as Africans. Her patriotic writings never led to the belief that she thought she was American. She only praises America as being the land in which she was taught Christianity.

During the colonial era in America, blacks that were born free lived rather quiet lives, but those who were former slaves such as Olaudah Equiano were telling their story and the horrors of slavery. Black slaves such as Phillis Wheatley were earning their freedom by showing their masters that they were capable of learning and possessed talents equal to that of any other people in the World. Blacks during this era had no sense of African Americanism because most were native Africans and still remembered their homeland. The sense of being American would not develop in blacks for at least another century.

Revolutionary Philosophy – The Civil War (1770s-1865)

The American Revolutionary philosophy influenced everyone that inhabited the United States of America. The Declaration of Independence became the most quoted American document in history because as the colonist fought for their freedom from Great Britain, blacks in America were also fighting for freedom; freedom from bondage so that they could attain their inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The irony of the American Revolution is simple; white Americans wanted their freedom from Britain because they were not being treated as British citizens, yet they wanted blacks to remain in an inferior position as slaves in the new nation. Many anti-slavery groups began during this period as well as black churches in America. The Quakers were among the first religious groups to denounce slavery and by 1792 all

northern states and Virginia had anti-slavery societies.¹² The establishment of black churches such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1816 provided blacks with more than just a congregation to worship God. The church provided many functions for blacks including schools and a meeting place to discuss political issues.¹³ All the predominantly black churches of the era were named “African” and not “African-American.” The abolition of slavery in the north soon followed. By 1804, slavery had been abolished in all the northern states and in 1787 the Northwest Ordinance prohibited slavery or any type of involuntary servitude in the territory of the ordinance.¹⁴ Yet, slavery in the United States was far from over. The existence of slavery was concentrated in the lower southern states which still relied mainly on agriculture for economic stability. In 1793, Eli Whitney created the cotton gin and spurred an agriculture revolution “The Cotton Kingdom.” The southern states had not been that profitable because of the Industrial Revolution, but with the invention of the cotton gin they had a new staple crop that would prove to be more profitable than any other crop America had ever produced.¹⁵ Thus, the South fought to protect its “peculiar institution” because of its economic advantages.¹⁶ It would eventually take the Civil War between the North and South of the United States between the years 1861 and 1865 to put an end to slavery in all of the United States of America.

The political literature of blacks in America from the beginning of the nation was primarily anti-slavery literature. Again the fugitive slave narrative would be popular and used affectively to illustrate the wrongs of slavery, but the tone of blacks was still one of a people who had been taken from their native land. David Walker was one of the first militant black abolitionists. He wrote against slavery as well as white racism all across

America. His famous work, *David Walker's Appeal in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America*, was an appeal to the U. S. Constitution concerning the rights of blacks in America. This appeal was written in 1830. Walker was speaking to his fellow black people that lived in the United States, but still did not portray a sense of an African American race in America.¹⁷ Walker's mentality was that all blacks in the world were of a common ancestry and thus made up the black race. Walker describes blacks as "the sons of Africa" and describes blacks in America as "coloured people of these United States of America."¹⁸ Walker attempts to call blacks in America to action in his appeal and becomes one of the first black writers to call on blacks to stand collectively against slavery. This type of writing began a long transition period for blacks in America who would eventually see themselves as African American.

During this same period the first black female political writer of America emerged; her name was Maria W. Stewart. Stewart was inspired by *David Walker's Appeal* and wrote numerous essays on various topics such as slavery and women's rights. She published *Productions of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart*, a collection of essays and speeches, in 1835.¹⁹ In her introduction of the essay "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality, the Sure Foundation on Which We Must Build," Stewart poses the question "And shall Afric's sons be silent any longer?"²⁰ Stewart followed David Walker in calling blacks to take their own destiny in their own hands.

The most prominent black figure in America during the later years of slavery and the Civil War was Frederick Douglass. Douglass was a very effective oral and written communicator. He became the first black to be considered a spokesperson for blacks in

America and was one of the first blacks that had a major influence on politics in America. Douglas wrote two autobiographies in his life time; the first was titled *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* and was written in 1845. This was written to tell people his story and to inform his critics that he came from a slave background, yet still became the dynamic orator that he was. This narrative was written while Douglass was in the depths of the abolitionist movement. The narrative title explicitly acknowledges Douglas as “an American slave” and not as “the African” as other narratives had before. Douglass first narrative is known for its expression of not only the physical, but also the mental effects that slavery had on a human being. In 1847, Douglass started his own newspaper, *The North Star*, which he produced until 1863. Douglass was the most prominent black abolitionist and after the Civil War would continue to speak out against racial injustices to blacks in America.²¹

The political writings of this era in American history were all motive based and did not directly address an issue of a black identity in America. The abolition of slavery was the first concern of blacks in America. This is understandable in the evolution of a people; their immediate physical needs and state of being are more important than social and political statuses. The calling upon of black slaves to fight for their rights by such advocates as David Walker and Fredrick Douglas would begin the transition of blacks into becoming a people because it brought together black advocates of the North and black slaves of the South. Yet, it would definitely be after slavery before blacks in the United States would begin to search for their identity in America.

Reconstruction – WWI (1865-1919)

The official end to slavery in 1865 was the beginning of a new struggle for blacks in America. During slavery white advocates of slavery made it difficult for most black slaves to read abolitionist material and to speak out against their current state of being. This aided in blacks not being able to come together. After slavery the hardships of being free would lead many blacks to dependence and force them to listen to their black counterparts in the North. The abolitionist movement produced numerous black political activists who would lead the fight against white racism and prejudices in the free United States of America. The calls for blacks to collectively act against the injustices of slavery were the beginning of notions of blacks recognizing their common strand in American history. Many whites and northern free blacks had begun to refer to blacks in America as the black race, but it would be the next era in American history, Reconstruction, that would open the eyes of blacks to the oppression that was still in store for them in America. The struggles that would bind blacks together would make them a common people in America.

Reconstruction was a progressive time in American history for blacks, but it lasted for a little over a decade before Jim Crow became a way of life in the South and blacks began to face harsh treatment from racist all over the country. During Reconstruction, the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments to the U.S. Constitution abolished slavery, made black males citizens, and allowed black males to vote, respectively.²² Also, volunteers as well as government agencies began to assist the newly freed slaves in educational and vocational endeavors. Black males exercised their right to vote and many blacks were elected to local and state governments in the South, as

well as a few being elected to the national government. Yet, it was still hard for blacks to make the transition “from slavery to freedom” because of the economic challenges that faced them. Many had no work experience other than agricultural, but could not expect a decent wage from their former owners. Blacks who did possess a skilled trade were also hard pressed for work because many skilled white laborers formed official and unofficial unions to keep blacks from gaining decent paying jobs. Thus most blacks had two options: one, they became sharecroppers on farms in the south and worked the land for a percentage of the crop or a meager wage; two, they migrated to the North to work in the harsh conditions of industrial factories. Both options left blacks struggling economically and by the time Reconstruction ended and federal aid withdrew from the South the plight of blacks proved to be far from over.²³

The years after Reconstruction have been viewed as a setback to blacks by many scholars. The facts are that many blacks were disfranchised by unjust state laws and by white supremacy groups who intimidated blacks. The extreme use of violence against blacks by supremacy groups led them to live in a constant state of fear and a landmark Supreme Court case legalized segregation. In 1896, the Supreme Court ruled in *Plessy v. Ferguson* for segregation and created the doctrine “separate but equal.”²⁴ The decades following Reconstruction brought about a turning point in the mindset of blacks in America. Though the exact actions of what blacks should do to improve their future in America were not certain, many blacks began to speak out against injustices through various literary forms. The urban ghettos of the North provided blacks with communities in which they could express themselves socially and politically and finally, blacks began to think of America as home.

The leadership of blacks during Reconstruction and the decades immediately following was by educated blacks who had the opportunity to better themselves and sought this for their entire race. Following the lead of prominent abolitionist leaders such as Fredrick Douglass who was still alive during the majority of this era, black leaders summoned blacks to specific actions that they saw as means to better their condition in America. The major difference between this era of black leaders and those prior to them was that the answer to the “black problem” in America was not an easy one to answer and thus debates between the leaders were very controversial. The first two major voices to emerge during this era were those of Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois; both had their own agenda for blacks in America and were extraordinary communicators of their particular philosophies. Yet, while many pose their philosophies as Booker T. Washington v. W. E. B. Du Bois both were very instrumental in bringing different groups of blacks together to discuss the problems that blacks faced in America.

Booker T. Washington was born in 1856 and was enslaved during the first decade of his life. After slavery he began going to school and received an education at Hampton Institute, an industrial school for minorities in America. Washington’s background led him to believe that the economic status of blacks could be greatly improved in a short period of time and that this could be achieved without the popular opinion of most whites. He also believed that economic freedom was more worth striving for than social and political freedoms. Washington wanted improved lives for his fellow black citizens and taught a philosophy that consisted of industrial education, tolerance of white supremacy and more importance on “racial pride, solidarity, and self-help.”²⁵ Washington’s “Atlanta Exposition Address” given in 1895 to an audience of southern

business and political men and women thoroughly articulated his philosophy to whites and blacks in the South. Washington advises “To those of my race who depend on bettering their condition in a foreign land...Cast down your bucket where you are...Cast it down in agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service, and in the professions.”²⁶ Washington spoke of blacks as a race of people still in a foreign land. He warned that political and social freedoms would come after blacks proved themselves as productive citizens. Yet, he did believe in blacks uniting; he states to white Americans “In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.”²⁷ Washington promoted racial segregation and black unity; this sense of black unity would later grow into African American unity and racial pride.

Though W. E. B. Du Bois strongly disagreed with Washington concerning the different fronts that blacks should attempt to fight against white America, both brought the problems of blacks to the forefront and began to unite their followings. Du Bois, labeled an intellectual, had a very different outlook on life based on his background. He was born in 1868, after the abolition of slavery, to a prominent black family in Massachusetts and never experienced racism until he went to Fisk University in Nashville, TN in the year 1888. Du Bois was a lifetime scholar and one of the first to study the history and sociology of blacks in America. Du Bois’s contributions to black America were numerous, but his most famous literary work was *The Souls of Black Folks*. In this work Du Bois describes the double-consciousness of being black and American.²⁸ Du Bois describes “One ever feels his two-ness, -- and American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body,

whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”²⁹ And later posess the thought:

He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face.³⁰

Du Bois eloquent approach to putting this complicated thought on paper aided his fellow black citizens in thinking about their status as black and American and brought many intellectuals to think of the duality of this existence. Later in his life Du Bois, like Washington, embraced voluntary segregation of blacks as a means to improve themselves socially and economically.³¹

W.E.B. Du Bois’s concept of the “double consciousness” of being black Americans was the first black writing of its kind that aided blacks in identifying themselves in America. As other blacks read Du Bois’s thoughts it sparked a cultural phenomenon. Many blacks began to think about their historical significance in America as well as their African heritage. Blacks began to want to study their African heritage without also wanting to return to Africa. Du Bois had expressed the need for blacks in America to embrace their two-ness, or conflicting identities of being black and American. This new mentality of thinking about being black in America revolutionized black artistic expression and influenced thousands to embrace their African heritage while still attempting to live comfortable lives in America.

Black women also influenced the political and social aspects of black life in America and aided in the transition of becoming African American. Two such women were Anna Julia Cooper and Pauline E. Hopkins. Both women were born during slavery and were young adults during the Reconstruction period in America.³² Cooper was one of the first black Americans to earn a Ph.D. and committed herself to education for blacks and women. In 1892, Cooper's book, *A Voice from the South by a Black woman of the South*, was published; it included numerous essays and lectures that Cooper had written. One of the essays "Womanhood a Vital Element in the Regeneration and Progress of a Race" reasons that black women are just as important to the progress of the black race as well as the entire world. Cooper uses history and Christianity to argue her point. The essay is a brilliant work of an educated woman who writes specifically to her audience which she describes as colored clergy of the Protestant Episcopal Church.³³

Pauline E. Hopkins was of the most prominent black female writers of the early twentieth century. She published many works in the *Colored American Magazine* which was a magazine of progressive political observations and creative writing. Hopkins was known for her two works *Famous Men of the Negro Race* and *Famous Women of the Negro Race*. Hopkins was noted for her understanding of the diverse political positions of blacks in America, particularly that of Washington and Du Bois. Though Hopkins never endorsed one philosophy over the other she did write numerous works of prose and fiction that depicted the problems that blacks faced in America.³⁴

The decades after Reconstruction were filled with many struggles for blacks in America. In 1898, black soldiers fought in the Spanish-American War which subjected non-white Cubans to American imperialism, yet black soldiers were still openly

discriminated against in the American military. And the discrimination black troops faced when they returned from the war was the same as when they left.³⁵ Yet, during the decades after Reconstruction blacks promoted two prominent leaders and began to identify themselves as a race of people in America who had the same rights as all other Americans. For the first time in black history, all blacks- intellectuals and vocational geniuses, Northern and Southern blacks, mulatto and dark blacks, and men and women- began to define their struggles as a common problem that they could overcome themselves, united as a people.

One of the most symbolic literary pieces of this era was James Weldon Johnson's poem "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing" which was set to music in 1900 and unofficially named the Negro National Anthem.³⁶ The decades after Reconstruction, entitled by some literary scholars as "The New Negro Renaissance," launched blacks in America to the point of identifying themselves as "African American." But for those who were still unsure about black lives in the United States, the literary and cultural Renaissance that occurred in Northern ghettos during the 1920s would solidify the notion of being African American. This movement is commonly known as "The Harlem Renaissance."

Between the World Wars (1920-1940)

After World War I, many black troops returned to the United States from sites abroad with a new outlook on life and black women who had worked numerous industrial jobs during the war years also had a new outlook on life. Blacks were eager for a new way of life in the United States. Several organizations began to protest for black citizens and the "new negro" that emerged in the post-Reconstruction era continued to speak out against the manner in which blacks were treated in a country that they had just gone and

fought for. The primary settings of blacks voicing their opinions were the northern black communities whose populations had soared since the post-Reconstruction exodus of blacks from the South. This era was characterized by the literary figures who influenced blacks nationwide to be proud of their African heritage and to accept nothing less than respect from their fellow white citizens.

The organizations that had major influences during this era were the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) and the UNIA (Universal Negro Improvement Association). The NAACP was founded in 1910 after a group of black and white activist met to discuss race issues in America. During the 1920s, they became one of the primary social organizations that began to speak out about the injustices that black Americans faced in America. One of their primary concerns was the violence committed against blacks. In 1919, the NAACP published *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889-1918*; this publication was an educational tool used to promote an anti-lynching bill that was being debated in Congress.³⁷ Another important medium of the NAACP was its monthly periodical, *Crisis*, which was edited by W. E. B. Du Bois and used as an outlet to express blacks' frustrations with America.³⁸

The UNIA (Universal Negro Improvement Association) was founded by Marcus Garvey in 1914 in Jamaica and the first American chapter was founded in New York in 1916. Garvey was an eccentric black leader. He had a dynamic leadership style that most blacks during this era admired, yet his political strategies and business skills were weak. Garvey promoted "Africa for the Africans" a colonization project to migrate blacks back to Africa where they could succeed on their own. Garvey promoted racial segregation and even went so far as to meet with the Ku Klux Klan to discuss their "racially exclusive

views of society.”³⁹ Garvey’s downfall was his failed business venture, The Black Star Line, a shipping line that was to aid in transporting blacks back to Africa. Garvey raised money for the line through donations, but never raised enough to sustain the shipping line and his other endeavors. Though Garvey’s major project was a complete failure; his contribution to the racial pride movement of the 1920s was tremendous. Marcus Garvey was a very dark black man that dressed very flamboyant for his lectures and rallies. His demeanor and racial exclusivity doctrine inspired blacks to view their race with pride.⁴⁰

Garvey’s colonization philosophy was outdated to American blacks by the 1920s; many of the black leaders and literary figures were determined to make a decent living in their home—the United States of America. One of the most notable literary figures of this time was Alain Locke. In 1925, Locke published *The New Negro*, “the central text of the Harlem Renaissance.”⁴¹ The Norton Anthology of African American literature describes *The New Negro* as “a coherent and articulate announcement of a new spirit among black Americans.”⁴² Locke’s book was an anthology of works by other prominent black literary figures including Langston Hughes and Claude McKay with a prose essay written by himself. In his prose, Locke describes the new mentality of blacks in America particularly those who were in the urban northern communities. The largest black community at the time was Harlem and it was considered a mecca for black Americans. Harlem produced numerous black musical groups that would eventually gain national attention and was the focal point of all black literary and artistic expression. Thus, the decade between 1920 and 1930 was known as “the Harlem Renaissance.” Locke discusses all of these developments in his book.

Locke also discussed the psychological difference between blacks then and blacks in the past. He states “it must be admitted that American Negroes have been a race more in name than in fact, or to be exact, more in sentiment than in experience.”⁴³ He then goes on to say “When the racial leaders of twenty years ago spoke of developing race-pride and stimulating race consciousness, and of the desirability of race solidarity, they could not in any accurate degree have anticipated the abrupt feeling that has surged up and now pervades the awakened centers.”⁴⁴ Locke expresses his view of the American Negro by stating “This deep feeling of race is at present the mainspring of Negro life.”⁴⁵ Locke’s statement would be illustrated time and time again during this era through the drama, poetry, fiction, and other writings of black Americans during this decade.

Alain Locke’s *The New Negro* and the writings that it consisted of described the identity that black Americans had adopted for themselves; this identity originated from Du Bois’s “double conscience” philosophy that was described in *The Souls of Black Folks* in 1903. The new Negro was black and American and proud of both; the new Negro expressed an appreciation for their ancestry and had an optimistic outlook on their presence in America. New Negroes were a people with a common cultural lineage that understood the power of many standing for a common cause. New Negroes became African American, the racial identity they chose for themselves.

The 1920s in African American history were a continuation of the ideas that were introduced by turn of the century black leaders, yet it took these ideas and made them into an attitude. Racial pride and race solidarity became the theme and attitude of blacks’ lives during the 1920s and it was from this point on that black Americans were according to themselves African Americans, a distinct race in America. This distinction

would lead blacks into the Great Depression of the 1930s and World War II with a new sense of activism toward their own civil rights. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s would be the outcome of this solidified attitude among blacks.

Conclusion

Throughout the history of America, blacks have existed side by side with its other citizens, yet their plight was as unique as any one group of people in the world. Blacks were considered the inferior people in America and had always been thought of in that manner since the beginning of the British American colonies. After most blacks in America were freed from slavery, they were free from bondage, but not free of the inferiority complex that had been instilled in them since they were isolated from their way of life and brought to America. Yet, in less than half a century after slavery black leaders were already calling on “their” people to stand up for their civil rights in America. It would be a long fight for their civil rights, but it would not be long before blacks in America began to see themselves as just that — black Americans. All colonization projects that called for blacks to migrate back to Africa were denounced and blacks began to see themselves as a productive citizen in America. The racial identity that emerged in the early 1900s and was strengthened in the decade of the 1920s would never be taken away from black Americans. This racial pride and solidarity movement was the force that erupted into the Civil Rights Movement that aided blacks in regaining their right to the franchise and ended the extreme segregation laws that divided America. African Americans had collectively accomplished a task in which many generations of blacks had longed for in the past and it was their strength in numbers that had aided in them overcoming their hardships.

Notes

1. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, Hard Road to Freedom: The Story of African America (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 23.
2. Horton and Horton, 7-25.
3. Horton and Horton, 26.
4. John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans, 8th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf; 2002), 39.
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